Emergence of Civilizations / Anthro 341: Notes 14
Mesopotamia: Early Dynastic hyperurbanism and palaces
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- Early Dynastic (I, II, IIIa, IIIb) 2900 BC - 2373 BC (473 years)
  - The name of the period is the “Early Dynastic Period”, in contrast to later, named dynasties
    - It is not the “early” part of the “dynastic” period
  - We have lots more evidence for the Early Dynastic than for earlier periods
    - More written evidence, since writing was becoming more widely used
    - The archaeological material is more spectacular, closer to the surface, and there is more of it (because populations and wealth had increased) so it has gotten more attention
    - This does not mean that the Early Dynastic period was the most important for the origin of civilization; one could argue that Sumerian civilization had already appeared by this time and was already changing from its earliest form

- Hyperurbanism
  - a pattern of near-abandonment of the rural countryside and extreme concentration of people into large settlements
  - The beginning of the Early Dynastic saw the culmination of a long history of changes in the way people were distributed across the landscape
    - Sumer was probably the first region in the world where people experienced city life something like what we know today
    - To understand this change, we have to back up and follow the trends from the beginning of the ‘Ubaid period
  - Early ‘Ubaid (‘Ubaid: 5600-3900 BC): moderate-sized villages, evenly dispersed
  - By Late ‘Ubaid (‘Ubaid 4): the same kind of villages, plus Eridu, which had increased to 10 ha (ballpark 2000 people, plus or minus a few thousand...), with its central temple
  - In the Late Uruk period (3400-3100 BC): more people moved into a few large sites, each surrounded by a halo of rural settlements that were smaller than the earlier towns
    - this was the beginning of the general pattern of cities with a supporting rural hinterland
    - average settlement was only 1-2 ha (ballpark 200-400 people)
    - the city of Uruk was unique in being far larger: 100 ha, maybe 20,000 people at 3000 BC
    - plus a handful of other large towns/small cities, especially Ur, Nippur, Kish, and Eridu
      - smaller than Uruk (or maybe not, according to Nissen), but much bigger than the small hamlets clustering around them
      - they reflected basically the same setup as Uruk, just less exaggerated
    - why did people cluster into towns and surrounding villages like this?
      - maybe for defense?
  - Somewhere in the Jemdet Nasr period (3100-2900 BC) and/or the beginning of the Early Dynastic period (2900 - 2373 BC) (say around 3000-2800 BC?)
    - most people quit living in small hamlets altogether
    - instead crowding almost exclusively into cities or the large towns that surrounded them
    - What Adams called “hyperurbanism”
    - this shift took only around 200 years
leading to the near disappearance of small hamlets in the rural countryside
- people would have had a long walk from the large towns or cities to their fields to work
- more distant areas of farmland were abandoned altogether
- Uruk ballooned to 250 ha, maybe 50,000 people
  - near the beginning of the Early Dynastic (2800 BC), covered 250 ha (617 acres)
    - almost three times the area of the whole SSU campus
  - by the end of the Early Dynastic (~2400 BC), covered 400 hectares
    - 4.5 times the area of the entire SSU campus
    - entirely enclosed by a city wall
- Surrounding Uruk:
  - most of the small to medium-sized villages were abandoned
  - the few settlements that remained grew much larger
    - average settlement 6-10 ha
    - ballpark 1200-2000 people, maybe more
  - two or even three “modes” of site sizes
    - the clear differences between the modes (categories of site sizes) suggests that some functions were carried out only at the larger types of sites
      - that is, there are distinct jumps in size between one size category and the next, rather than a smooth gradation of sizes
      - the generally accepted way to explain this is that each “jump” up in size corresponds to a distinct additional function or institution present at the site, which would require numerous people to staff
        - For example, a site either has no temple, or has one and is therefore considerably bigger than sites without one - it can't have half a temple with half a temple's personnel and half the people who support and are supported by them
    - if correct, this model implies a hierarchy of sites something like this:
      - smallest sites
        - mostly residential, only farming families live there
      - medium sites
        - residential, plus…
        - some administrative functions requiring special buildings, storage facilities, additional people, etc.
      - largest site(s)
        - residential, plus…
        - the same administrative functions as a medium site, plus…
        - the temple, palace, army, etc.
        - making it far bigger yet
- so the different sizes of settlements may have differed not only in size, but also in kind
  - presumably ranked in importance, influence, and administrative role
  - with the larger ones higher in the hierarchy
  - these had additional, less common functions
people in smaller towns would have been dependent on the larger ones for the services that were available only there
this implies a complex, interdependent, and hierarchical society, with three (or more) levels in its administrative hierarchy

why did hyperurbanism happen?
due to warfare between cities, or fear of it?
problems with nomadic people, with whom farmers would have had to trade, but with whom there might have been conflicts?
attraction of new economic possibilities in the towns?
intentional policies of an emerging urban elite, encouraging or forcing people to move into towns (as Adams suggests)?
intended to improve control over population?
what effect might hyperurbanism have had?
increased interaction, communication
more complex economy, since fewer would be farmers and more would depend on exchanging their labor for subsistence
probably increased competition between people and magnified differences in wealth
more potential for taxation, labor recruitment, etc.

the population of the Mesopotamian plain by the Early Dynastic was 500,000 to 1 million people
living in roughly seven city-states
a city-state is a complex political unit (a state) made up of a single city and the smaller settlements associated with it
in contrast to a “nation-state” that would include multiple cities in a region
each city-state was comprised of a single “primate” settlement pattern with three levels:
one large city
surrounded by towns (the middle level)
and a very few small agricultural hamlets (the bottom level)
the city-states all shared the Sumerian culture, but were not united in a single organization
rather, they were in competition, and were walled to defend themselves from the others
the fact that so few people lived in small, rural hamlets hints that it was often not safe outside the walls

Cities and architecture:
dense, with “blocks” separated by streets and alleys, like modern Near Eastern cities
in central, high-status areas, mostly two-story houses around central courtyards
some had latrines and drains

The temples’ power continued to increase
huge walled-in precincts at the core of each city (>3 ha at Khafaje in Diyala valley)
the precincts included not only the temple, but also
workshops (sculpture in stone and cast copper, at least)
storage rooms
− high-status dwellings, presumably for priests or administrators
− outer wall enclosed a semi-public courtyard, inner wall enclosed the temple precinct itself
  − presumably to keep some of the sacred activities secret or restricted to certain people
  − and to protect the temple workshops and stored wealth
− by ED II, temples like the one at Khafaje had an open-air pedestal in the plaza at the foot of the temple
  − may mean that too many people were involved in ceremonies to fit inside the temple
− the temple itself was increasingly big and elaborate
− tradition of commissioned “votive” statues that probably stood inside the temples
  − often labeled with the name of the person it represents
− temple details varied widely from city to city
  − yet some temples in different cities had certain items that were nearly identical
    − such as a stela from Khafaje that exactly matches one from Ur
    − suggests a lot of contact between high-level temple experts
    − or maybe traveling specialist craftsmen who worked in multiple cities
− Early Dynastic temples were not just religious institutions
  − like modern institutional religions, they had huge economic and political power, too
− some functions of temples in the Early Dynastic:
  − public, and probably also private, religious ritual
  − accepted and stored surplus production
    − probably in the form of offerings, tithes, payments for ritual services, etc.
    − redistributed it to others
    − probably mostly in compensation for labor, services, or goods
  − advised on timing of planting and harvesting based on contact with gods through omens
    − giving the temple a central role in agricultural production
  − controlled irrigation water distribution due to supernatural authority over water
    − again, giving the temple real economic power
  − initiated large corporate projects
    − temple buildings and facilities, canals, probably coordinated and financed early city walls (before there were kings and palaces), etc.
  − owned land and employed agricultural workers directly
  − used surplus to support craft specialists
    − scribes, potters, masons, weavers, copperworkers, sculptors
  − managed long-distance trade
    − especially for exotic materials needed to build, decorate, and maintain the temple
    − and to clothe and ornament the priests and other religious authorities appropriately to their roles and importance
  − all in all, the priests and temple administrators would have been powerful for both supernatural and material reasons

− Sumerian religion and ideology
  − mostly known from 2nd millennium texts (1000's BC), which are centuries later than the Early Dynastic
but since temple architecture and religious iconography changed so little, the beliefs may also have not changed much since the Early Dynastic, Uruk period, or even earlier
- religious cosmology was a model of, and legitimization for, life here on earth
- the gods established unchanging laws
- there was a hierarchy of gods
  - The pantheon was headed by Anu
    - King of heaven
    - the one who bestows royalty on humans
      - this meant that kingship was a necessary part of the natural (and supernatural) world
  - next were two other main gods:
    - Enlil, god of Earth
    - Enki, god of water and subterranean world
  - then three subsidiary deities:
    - Utu, god of sun
    - Nanna, god of moon
    - Inanna, goddess of the star Venus
      - she was also Anu’s consort, lady of heaven
      - responsible for lunar calendar, therefore for many omens
      - became the goddess of war and sexual love (!)
  - these and other high ranking gods were lords of temple institutions and cities
  - below them were lower gods for individuals
  - people were at the bottom
    - they belonged to their city’s god
  - the gods created people specifically to relieve the gods from the drudgery of work
  - gods appointed human representatives to direct the work: the priests of each temple
  - This ideology served to legitimize the political and economic order
    - as in several of the definitions of civilization
    - question: did the ideology encourage the rise of a hierarchical society, or did an emerging hierarchical society form the ideology?
      - if the latter, was it conscious and intentional, or not?
  - Temple ceremonies included seasonal feasts
    - attended by the public
      - biggest one was to ask for the annual spring regeneration of vegetation
        - by honoring the marriage of the city ruler to the goddess Inanna (or her representative)

In the Early Dynastic period, a new, powerful institution appeared: the palace
- the secular, military, royal residence compound of a king
- palaces appeared in addition to temples in ED III at Mari, Kish, Eridu, maybe other cities (around 2500 or 2400 BC)
  - architecturally different from temples or other apparently ceremonial architecture
  - lacked the ritual complex with a ziggurat platform, “cella” with a freestanding pedestal and niche or pedestal at one end, the big courtyard, etc.
  - that is, no obviously public ceremonial space
– although they did have smaller ritual areas, probably for internal or personal use
– palaces had hundreds of rooms
  – storerooms, apparently for storage of tribute or taxes
  – workshops, probably staffed by “attached” specialists
  – royal residence
  – administrative rooms
  – archives of cuneiform documents, as at the temples
    – the archive in the palace at Ebla contained 13,000 tablets
– development of hereditary kingship (texts show kingship was passed down as many as 6 generations)
  – in contrast to temple leadership
  – there must have been people in charge of the temple institutions, but there are no written records that indicate that these positions were hereditary
– kingship seems to have had different origins in different cities
  – based on linguistic evidence
  – some kings were addressed as “lugal” (king), a word suggesting military leader appointed by a ruling council
  – others as “sangu” (accountant) (!), the word used for the top administrator of a temple
  – others by “ensi”, a word apparently related to the term for the human husband of a city’s goddess (that is, a ritual, temple-related office)
  – later, some by “ugula” (foreman)
  – suggests that in different cities, different offices, roles, or institutions gave rise to powerful secular institutions that look the same to us: palaces with “kings”
  – presumably, the process by which this happened varied somewhat in each case
– The famous Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh illustrates how some people of the time thought of kingship
  – actually, a collection of stories, some tightly related, others not, but involving overlapping sets of the same characters
  – the most famous ones describe Gilgamesh’s supernatural deeds, and his failed attempts to become immortal
  – many of the named characters are known from historical inscriptions, and most scholars think that Gilgamesh was a real ruler of Uruk in the Early Dynastic period
  – for understanding the origins of kingship, the most relevant story is one that is translated as one of your readings
    – Gilgamesh, the ensi of Uruk in the middle Early Dynastic period, first has to seek the approval of a council of elders, and then override them by convincing an assembly of the city’s able-bodied men, before he can make war against the threatening city of Kish.
    – Later, he does not have to get approval to end the war and let the king of Kish go.
    – In other stories, he does not need consent from these councils, and he builds (or rebuilds) the wall around Uruk, some of which does indeed date to this period.
– some scholars say that this sequence of consulting councils is just a literary or poetic device, and should not be taken literally
  – even so, this story may record how people perceived the development of kingship
  – or propaganda about it that would have seemed believable to them
that is, kingship in this case supposedly arose as a consensus government granted a notable person special powers during wartime, and he gradually took on permanent power
- is that how it actually happened? maybe… we just don’t know

- Functions of the palace
  - military role of the palace
    - Warfare between cities (city states) was rampant in the Early Dynastic
      - shown by huge defensive walls at all major sites, completing a trend that had begun already in the late ‘Ubaid period
    - stelae and written inscriptions on buildings and artifacts commemorate kings who led professional armies with standardized weaponry
      - presumably supported by surplus collected and managed by the palace
      - and armed with standard equipment made in palace workshops
    - the Early Dynastic II/III stela from Lagash shows this kind of uniform, regimented army
      - ranks of men in identical helmets, with shields
      - other ranks with lighter shields and spears, etc.
      - indicating specialized regiments
    - wars were not for conquest (taking control of a group of people for the long term)
      - but rather, raiding (capturing wealth, animals, people)
      - or gaining and keeping control of disputed areas of irrigated farmland
        - as in the Gilgamesh and Akka story, apparently fighting over water sources
    - by contrast, the temple institution apparently had little to do with warfare
  - at times during the Early Dynastic, one king and his city-state were seen as dominant, “ruling” Sumer, but there was little integration or centralization
    - the “ruling” king was just a “first among equals”
    - or one who happened to be the most militarily powerful at the time
    - the “ruling” city-state did not have any different functions than the other city-states
  - kings are recorded as building water projects
    - this might have been both a function and a source of power
    - note that the Gilgamesh story we read emphasized an ongoing project of building wells that seemed to be the responsibility of the city as a whole
  - the palace organized long-distance trade
    - merchant agents were employed by the king
      - they got cloth, clothes, barley, oil, flour from royal stores (mostly things that Sumer could produce), and took it abroad to exchange for foreign goods for the palace
      - the temple, and possibly even independent traders, may have carried out long-distance trade, too
    - the other side of this trading was made up of neighboring groups, especially to the east in the Zagros mountains, who themselves were developing cities and complex societies
      - example: Tepe Yaya in southeastern Iran, which made chlorite (a kind of stone) bowls that they traded to Sumer
    - this is not a case of a dominant core area extracting raw materials from an underdeveloped periphery, like England during the British Empire
the Sumerians were only modestly ahead of their trading partners in complexity or technology

laws, conflict resolution, and maintaining order were a secular (palace) matter, not religious

Urukagina, last Early Dynastic king of Lagash (around 2350 BC) is known for his legal reforms, which were recorded in inscriptions on buildings of his time.

that is over 500 years before the famous law code of Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC)

Hammurabi is better known because we have a nice, complete copy of his law code, while earlier ones (well before Urukagina) are known only from fragmentary references

Urukagina, a king, proclaimed legal reforms that would restore the justice implied to have existed before

harking back to a memory or myth of a time when the temple ruled

this was, in fact, accurate history

the temple did exist long before the palace, and presumably was a place where conflicts were resolved

later on, that role shifted to the palace, for whatever reason

Urukagina was also using a perception that the power formerly exercised by the temple was legitimate

and that the palace now legitimately had that power

this could have been propaganda to justify new powers asserted by the palace…

Urukagina promised legal protections for common people from abuses by the temple and the palace

this implies that there were such abuses, and hints at the power these institutions had

he also promised legal protection against confiscation of property and cheating in trade

implies that there was private property and regulated exchange

Urukagina also promised to cut certain taxes on commoners (!)

heard that one before? (this promise dates to about 2350 BC)

confirms that the palace collected taxes

these reforms would have increased Urukagina’s power

he is both exercising and claiming powers over other institutions

this is the sort of maneuvering that anthropologists envision when they talk about leaders “strengthening and expanding their privileged positions”

overall, a shifting balance of power between temple and palace

the temple was initially the only institutional power center

and was probably more powerful than the early palaces and the kings that operated them

but there was an apparent shift in power away from the temple and towards the palace, with its secular king/military leader

in the Early Dynastic, social stratification became more pronounced than ever before

“royal burials” at Ur attest to a very privileged royalty and court or nobility

excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920’s

over 2500 burials, mostly ED III (2500 - 2400 BC)

16 were particularly lavish, and have been called “royal” tombs

most were badly looted, but not all
one example: tomb 789
  - larger outer chamber containing:
  - two wagons with oxen and male servants
  - 59 bodies, mostly richly-attired females, and a few male soldiers
  - maybe went willingly to their deaths, maybe drugged, with their valuables and finery
    - based on absence of traumatic injuries or positions that would suggest struggle
    - but there could be other ways to explain this…
  - gold, silver, lapis, musical instruments, wood inlay...

another tomb (800), had a queen’s chamber still intact
  - the queen was named Shubad or Puabi (depending on how the signs are read)
  - her remains were still on her bed, surrounded by rich jewelry
  - this tomb also had a larger, outer chamber in which many attendants wearing jewelry
    were apparently sacrificed
  - along with musical instruments, a sledge, animals to pull it, and some soldiers or guards

at the other end of the social hierarchy, written records from the Early Dynastic period
include the first documentation of slaves
  - slavery may have existed earlier, but this is the first clear evidence of it
  - apparently not a large class; only a small part of the population and economy
  - mostly female
  - mostly worked at spinning yarn and weaving in shops run by the temple
  - records show citizens became slaves by falling into debt or being sold by their families (!)
    - it was possible to buy one’s own freedom

intermediate social statuses included at least:
  - farmers, presumably low status, because there were many of them
  - laborers and craftspeople, probably of differing status by their products and skills
    - since some moved and stacked bricks, hauled cargo, etc.
    - others made bricks or mass-produced crude pottery
    - others made fine ceramics, metalwork, jewelry, etc. that required more training, contact
      with elites, etc.
  - scribes
    - literacy was a rare skill in which people were specifically trained in schools or
      apprenticeships
    - and it involved a lot of contact with traders, political and religious elites, etc. who had to
      trust them with crucial information

another indication of social status hierarchy: the “standard professions list”
  - this is one of many texts that scribes in training would write over and over again for
    practice
  - it is a stereotyped list of particular jobs and offices
  - always in the same order, with divisions and titles that suggest that the order was from the
    highest status to the lowest
  - unfortunately, only some of the job titles can be translated
  - but just the existence of a standard, ordered list emphasizes that people thought in terms of
    an explicit social hierarchy
– another indication of social hierarchy: wide variation in houses
  – size and number of rooms
  – one vs. two stories
  – doors off main streets or alleys
  – presence or absence of central courtyard

– Technology and production
  – the Early Dynastic was not notable for technological innovation, but rather for increasing scale of production and amount of goods made
  – large scale weaving of wool and flax (linseed – linen cloth)
  – copperwork became more common for tools, containers, and art
    – including both arsenic bronze and tin bronze
    – (bronzes are alloys made by mixing copper and something else, usually tin or arsenic, to produce a harder metal with other desirable properties)
  – the increasing scale of production implies more specialist craftspeople
    – although still estimated to be under 20% of population
      – that is, over 80% of the people were still farmers, even in the cities
    – both the temple and the palace supported specialist workshops and specialized workers
      – some worked for temple
        – frieze of the dairy at the Early Dynastic period temple at al ‘Ubaid suggests organized dairy production attached to the temple
        – some made decorations and supplies for ritual and the temple buildings themselves
          – goods for temple personnel
          – goods for exchange by the temple, to get foreign raw materials
      – others worked for the palace
        – making decorations and supplies for the royal court and palace personnel
        – goods for exchange to get foreign raw material
        – goods for the military arm of the palace
          – weapons, armor, chariots
      – still others worked for wealthy individuals
        – as suggested by hoards of valuables in some large houses
        – and apparent vendor’s stalls facing the streets
          – but there is still no sign of money, neither coins nor textual references
            – trade was by barter of goods
        – overall pattern in the Early Dynastic: lots of attached specialists producing goods that were controlled by institutions (temple and palace), some by high-status individuals, and maybe some unattached specialists - but probably not many

– Review of long-term trends in social stratification
  – Late ‘Ubaid
    – burial evidence
      – over 200 graves at Eridu, but they show little variation on wealth
      – up to a few pottery or stone vessels, occasionally a figurine or beads
      – concentration of wealth and presumably status at impressive temple complexes
some degree of craft specialization suggests probably varied social roles and statuses
zoned housing, best near temple, workshops further out, farmers furthest away
that is, the burial evidence and the other lines of evidence don't agree

Uruk period
not much burial evidence
but many other indicators of social stratification, like the 'Ubaid but even more so:
wealth concentrated at the temple
suggests that people associated with the temple would have had access to more sumptuous goods
temples would have required priests, administrators, etc. with special power and status
for example, some people had the role of “signing” or certifying written records of temple transactions, presumably indicating some power or status
craft specialists probably had a different, probably higher, status than ordinary farmers
scribes would have had a higher status, since they had a valuable and scarce skill
and would have to be honest, accurate, and discreet
zoned housing, best nearest temple

Jemdet Nasr period (or transition from terminal Uruk to initial Early Dynastic)
burials: somewhat more variation, suggesting some stratification
of 340 graves, 61 (20%) had one or two metal cups; 2 had numerous goods (the top < 1%)
Early Dynastic: clear evidence of huge status differences, especially by Early Dynastic III
burials ranging from poor to royal burials at Ur (Early Dynastic III)
variations in housing, up to palaces
variations in occupations (farmers, craftspeople, priests, royal court, officials who “signed” records, etc.) imply probable status differences
this was not new, but probably was even more exaggerated than it had been before
written legal protections refer to poor and slave classes, a ruling class, merchants
standard professions list shows a clearly conceived hierarchy of status according to peoples' occupations

By this point, any definition of civilization was certainly met
and notice: we are still talking about numerous, competing, fairly small city-states
regional unification of multiple cities would not happen until the following century
when Sargon of Agade (Akkad) began to conquer other cities
rather than just taking some spoils, he would leave a governor and a garrison of soldiers
to force the conquered city-state to pay tribute to his city indefinitely
but notice how late in the development of complex society this is
we will see that in Egypt, for instance, regional unification started much earlier in the process

So: when and how did civilization emerge here?
when in this parade of periods do you feel that civilization emerged?
what institutions and processes were involved?
what were the roles of economics, warfare, religion, population growth, the emerging elites themselves…?